

Westport Friends Meeting State of Society

2013

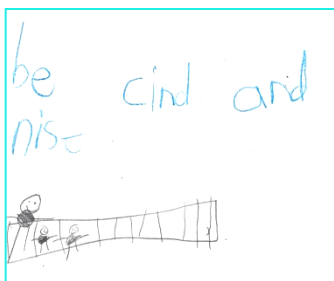
It has been two years since our Meeting created a State of Society in the traditional manner of Friends. As a Meeting community, consisting of both members and attendees, we have sensed a steady and deep awareness of the Spirit at work in our worship, especially as we have labored to provide stewardship of our property.

For several years our Meeting has deliberated whether to repurpose or sell the parsonage which was built in 1910. Having transitioned from a pastoral to an unprogrammed Friends Meeting many decades ago, we then used the parsonage to provide housing for Friends serving as our *Friend in Residence*, a concept that met our needs for many years. Two years ago, again in response to the evolving needs of our Meeting, we discontinued the role of Friend in Residence and began an experiment to employ a part-time Property Coordinator which currently is meeting our needs.

Last year, following a lengthy process of discernment that included input from the Meeting community and beyond, members were clear to sell the parsonage which allowed us to use the proceeds to upgrade and make necessary and costly repairs to the meetinghouse and Community House. These changes, to our organizational structure, property holdings and continuing care of our remaining facilities, has required tender and challenging deliberations encompassing worship, discussion, business meetings and careful financial oversight. In many ways over the past two years it has been our sense that we have been assessing and responding to our State of Society, not in a report, but through our collective decisions and actions as a Meeting community.

Though we are modest in numbers and continue to welcome new seekers to Meeting, there is a feeling among many who attend worship that we are also rich in Spirit. Over the past year we were pleased to welcome two people into membership. Our worship on First Day has also been enriched by the regular presence of several new people. Our First Day School continues to thrive with young and rambunctious children who are guided by talented and caring adults. Occasionally, there are as many children in worship as adults. This fact delights and challenges us as we seek how best to provide religious education for our youth while also being mindful of the spiritual needs of our teachers.

Parents, who continue in meeting for worship after their children leave for First Day School, share that participating in Worship, First Day School and Meeting-wide fellowship that follows each Sunday morning makes it a whole family experience. Reflections received from children using words and art, reveal that for them, worship also means “calm, quiet, peaceful, thinking time, [being] bored, light, loud (from babies), and playing together following worship behind the Community House.” (see art)



Some adults at meeting for worship express their enjoyment, in particular, of worshipping among a small gathering of Friends and others hope that we will grow. Friends expressed feeling safe in meeting and that they could come regardless of whatever level of emotional and spiritual energy that they felt able to share with others. In addition, Friends reflected that it didn't matter how or what others worshipped, that just being with other people was most important.

We are especially pleased by the formation last year of a Seekers Group which is held midweek once a month. Members and attendees who are a part of this gathering report that worship, combined with thematic discussions, deepens their personal and spiritual lives while also helping them to feel more connected to others within the Meeting community.

Though our size is an asset that we value, we realize too that the sum of the Meeting's overall responsibilities, from securing First Day School teachers to preparing and putting on our annual Book Fair, rests upon a small

circle of Friends. Moving forward, we plan to utilize resources that are available through the Yearly Meeting that hopefully will attract new seekers to Westport Meeting.

The Macomber Friends Community House continues to be a gift and resource that we cherish. The Building continues to provide space for our First Day School, fellowship after worship and other Meeting functions. We continue to make the Macomber Community House available to many groups from the surrounding community and to retreats and programs that are sponsored by New England Yearly Meeting. Expenses related to maintaining the facility are, however, an ongoing challenge for our Meeting community. We recognize, too, that each interaction with individuals and organizations that use this facility also creates an opportunity for outreach and ministry, primarily through our Property Coordinator and occasionally other Friends. Sharing the Community House, and occasionally its grounds, allows our Meeting to practice right use of our resources.

Regardless of our numbers, we are delighted and feel blessed to be able to worship each week in our newly renovated old and simple meetinghouse. One Friend reflected recently that being here in meeting for worship, in a building with such a rich, long history, creates a peaceful starting point for us to begin a new week and as way opens, to carry the Light we are given outward to share among others.

Approved at Monthly Meeting, June 29, 2014